YOU'VE GOT THE INFORMATION; WE'VE GOT THE EARS

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INTRODUCTION: TEAMWORK

I suspect there may be a person or two in this group who is wondering why someone with no background or training in agriculture should be making a presentation related to soils and crops and agricultural research and extension, at a meeting such as this.

I'll admit this may seem strange at first. However, there are a couple of things which I think will quickly offset what you might see as my deficiency.

First of all, I'm not here to talk about agriculture. I'm here to talk about radio, an area in which I have some professional knowledge and expertise. I've been broadcasting for eight years. Most of that has been primarily in or to rural communities and people whose livelihoods depend on agricultue.

Second, the co-authour of this endeavour was a farm boy, with an agriculture degree from this University, who also spent

approximately a year as a farm commentator on radio, and is now employed by Agriculture Canada as an Information Officer.

We have relied on each other's particular expertise, as we jointly prepared this paper.

Which brings me to the central point of this whole presentation. If you don't remember anything else of what is said here in the next few minutes, please remember the word "teamwork."

It is co-operation, or teamwork, between a professional broadcaster and a professional agrologist, which put this paper together. It is teamwork between you and your local radio station, which will help you get important information to the people who need it -- the farmers of this province (or whatever province or state you come from). To put it simply, you've got the information, we've got the listeners' ears.

WHAT RADIO IS, AND WHAT IT CONTRIBUTES TO THE TEAMWORK RELATIONSHIP

Speaking of radio, what is it?

I suppose some of you have seen *WKRP in Cincinatti*. That is a caricature of radio -- quite a bit of truth and a lot of exaggeration.

You can get a fairly good picture of radio by thinking for a

few moments about your own listening habits, and the habits of those around you.

I would venture to say more people wake up to clock radios than alarm clocks. You lie there and let the cobwebs clear out of your head, while you listen to some favorite, or not-so-favorite music. Then, there is a bright good-morning voice telling you what's happening today, and what the weather is going to be like. If you pick the right time and right station, you can even be awakened by a crowing rooster and farm report. Or maybe you wake up to the news -- after which you might be inclined to roll over, pull the covers over your head, and take the day off. Perhaps you get up and have breakfast, and then turn on the news and the weather and the sports. While you're driving to work, you may have the radio on in the car. While you're at work, you may have the radio on, as background noise -- though occasionally you'll listen more closely, as you hear a favorite tune, or something else which happens to catch your attention. At lunch time, you might make a point of checking the news and sports and farm scene while you're eating lunch. By supper time, you're likely to be watching tv or reading the newspaper, but you might have the radio on if you're working in your workroom in the basement, or tinkering at your hobby.

Every one of those ubran situations I've mentioned, has a rural counterpart. People listen to the radio while they're getting up and having breakfast. They listen while in the dairy barn and in the hog barn, while riding the tractor or swather or

combine, while driving to town for parts or childrens' lessons, or while working in the kitchen.

That is one of the most useful things about radio -- it is or can be, literally everywhere.

Another feature of radio is that it is current and topical. In the case of a major event, like a hostage-taking in Saskatoon, or an air crash in Gander, Newfoundland, the activity is updated regularly, as the situation unfolds. I have been on site at fires, producer meetings and election headquarters, where I simply picked up the telephone and called our station with information. I was either on the radio in the flick of a switch, or my material was recorded and used within the next hour.

Radio is right here, and right now.

Speaking of the telephone, that is what we in radio news generally use to get you on the radio with very little inconvenience. From the comfort and privacy of your own office, you can talk to thousands of people across the province, just by answering your telephone.

One of the first things a reporter learns about agricultural news is that if you have a question about anything, you phone an Ag. Rep. Take the cropping season, for example, when reports are prepared weekly, at the very least. How dry is it? How wet is it? What's the crop looking like? How bad are the grasshoppers, the wheat midges, the flea beetles? What about crop diseases? And so the questions go. There is a parallel for researchers, to

which I'll come in a few moments.

In putting together a crop report, it will usually take less than five minutes of an Ag. Rep.'s time, to get a timely piece of information out via telephone, and then radio.

The second lesson a reporter usually learns is that, if, by some very strange chance, the local Ag. Rep. doesn't know the answer, he or she can tell the reporter who to contact. It could be the soils and crops specialist, or the livestock specialist, or the soil scientist at the university, the soil testing lab, or the feed testing lab, or the pork specialist -- whomever. Or it could be the researcher who is either responsible for some new development, or at the forefront of some area about which the reporter wants information.

From our perspective, there is no need to be shy about speaking on the radio. You've got important information, and there's no better way of conveying it than directly and personally. Assume you have a responsible reporter on the other end of the line, who will not only do his best to get an accurate story out, but to make you sound like a radio super-star -- deleting all the extraneous noises, and allowing you to re-phrase you statement if you think you can say it better another way.

The kind of information which reporters generally find most useful usually falls into two categories. The first is information which will help farmers increase production. The second is information which will help farmers market their products

effectively. You will hear onther information on the radio, such as political decisions, but even those tend to fall into one of the two categories. They're related to production (or lack of production, in the case of crop insurance, for example) or to marketing (like the imposition of a countervailing duty). There are also statements from various producer groups, which, again, tend to fall into the two categories of production and marketing. You've probably heard of "Grow with Canola," a major project of the Canola Council of Canada. And everybody, it seems, has had something to say about a certain bird, which is black in colour, whether crowing about its virtues, or wanting it to pass on.

That's another thing. A well-turned phrase, even if it is a pun, will tend to stick in people's minds. Reporters tend to watch for them. Thus Fred Mitchell of Intercontinental Packers: "This province needs another pork processing plant like a moose needs a hatrack."

Radio, however, has its limitations. It would be less than honest to say it's perfect, and there is no point in trying to bluff.

One of the problems is available time. Normally, we do the news at the top of the hour. But that only runs about four minutes. Not much time into which someone can cram a lot of important information. Still, if it is a farm story which is of enough importance to a general listening audience, your story will make the hourly news. (I have been working on our news

editors, and increasingly, they are carrying farm stories in the news.)

Agricultural stories tend to be reserved for special news packages aimed directly at farmers, which come at special times of the day. At CJWW we have four farm shows at day, Monday to Friday: 6:15 and 6:45 am; 12:20 and 5:35 p.m. The length of those farm reports ranges from a minute and a half to ten minutes; the one broadcast during the noon hour is the major one. Other stations have more, or less agricultural content; some have none at all.

Given the limited time available, an individual story will run between 40 and 70 seconds, though a feature may go a bit longer. That means the radio story must give listeners the bare bones, and a little bit of detail. That might seem rather short, but studies have shown that if the radio news person allows stories to get too long, people will sub-consciously tune out. As well, of your stories get too long, you will only have time for a few separate items. But what you lose in length of time, you can gain by having the story repeated on several farm shows, or on the news, or perhaps in a comment by an announcer, between records.

In summary, radio is virtually everywhere, at all hours of the day, and night. In news, and in agricultural programs, you can convey important messages to farmers, which can aid substantially with their production and marketing. While radio has some limits, these can be overcome.

That is what radio has to offer to this teamwork or co-operative relationship.

RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PERSONNEL USING THE RADIO

The other side of the coin is what can researchers and extension people contribute to the teamwork approach of getting information to farmers across the province, or across the country.

I do not know what philosophical peculiarities professional agrologists are arguing these days on the importance of the researcher in publicizing his or her discoveries, so I am starting from a personal premise. If I discovered something which might lead to a significant change in agriculture, I'd want the whole world to know about it, and I'd be prepared to talk to anyone I could about what I've found.

And I don't think I am too far out. In doing advance stories to publicize this conference on our radio station, I got a message loud and clear from several people. Researchers have to keep the end users of their research in mind, and if the research results do not reach the farmer, what good are they? Or, how complete is the project for which you've received your research funds, if the results are not passed on to those who need the information? That is a question which might be asked more and more in a time when research funds are getting harder to come by.

So, I'm really saying two things. One is that I feel

researchers have a genuine responsibility for getting information about their research to farmers. The other thing I'm saying is, DON'T BE BASHFUL! If you've got something important to tell the world, speak up!

When I was talking about crop reports, I mentioned a series of problems -- wetness, dryness, insects, fungal diseases. There are a series of parallel questions which can be put to researchers. Do you have a new crop variety which is more suited for wet or dry areas of the province? It is resistant to root rot, stem rot, rust, glume blotch, blackleg, bunt, or sawflies? Will it survive in saline soil? Have you developed a new harvesting process (such as deflectors on swathers, to set up a good winter snow trap)? Those questions go on and on as well.

There are two time-tested methods of sending information to a wide range of people through radio.

The first is the "news release." That is not a "press release"; it is a "news release." A well-written news release runs about one page in length, and it covers the basics of the information -- who, what, when, where, why, and how. The University of Saskatchewan has a resident genius who looks after "news releases." His name is Joe Campbell. Agriculture Canada Research Saskatoon has Carl Lynn. Who have you got? If there isn't someone in your station, or your company, who is responsible for your public image, perhaps it is time you had one. And if all else fails, contact a local reporter, who will probably help you put your information in release form.

Anyway, by whatever means, at least send out a news release. Then, be prepared for some feed back, from reporters wanting an additional explanation, or just a comment. As a matter of fact, if you don't get phone calls, telephone some of your local farm reporters, and ask if they have received your release, and if it was clear to them.

Your second option, if you have a really major breakthrough is to call a "news conference." Its purpose is to inform the public of your news simultaneously. Invite all the local media outlets, even if you think some may not come. Phone their offices, preferably a day or two ahead of time. You might hand out a news release, and then mail it to other media. You might even want to do the mailing a day or two ahead of time, with a note that the information is embargoed until a certain time -- usually about the same time as the news conference.

A couple of tips about releases and conferences. Make your announcement sound exciting; that it's almost the neatest thing since sliced bread. I do not mean you should exagerate, but you should pick the key points. You've developed that new crop for a certain reason, so tell the people for whom you've developed the new variety. It might not be available to them for a year or two -- but by then, they will have been able to plan for it in their rotation. If it is a process they can put to use right away, let them know, so they can begin using it immediately.

And think is simple terms. How is this discovery going

to help producers? Will it put more money in their pockets? How many producers will this effect? What is the overall economic impact of the crop or process or whatever you've developed. Maybe you've found a new product that can be made from wild oats, that will realistically turn a few million dollars a year. How many farmers do you know who would like to be well-paid for their wild oats? (Maybe you can turn sow's ears into silk purses.)

I can recall receiving a wide range of news releases. Some come to mind quite readily. The introduction of "HY-320" wheat, of "Westar" canola, or "Norgold" sweetclover. Work being done on *nosema locustae* to stop grasshoppers, and the use of both dimethoate and Furidan on a bran bait. Attempts to develop salt-tolerant flax varieties. Various "FarmLab" projects (covered from the researcher's and the farmer co-operator's points of view). And most recently, research on the importance of using clean seed when planting a crop.

Something else to remember. In a world where there is no such a thing as a free lunch, there may be one deal left. I mentioned earlier that the average story time is between 40 and 70 seconds. Please remember commercials of a similar length cost between 50 cents a dollar per second, perhaps even more, depending on the station and the time of day. That is one way of calaulating the value of information from a radio perspective. If what you've got is genuine news, it will reach people at no cost to you.

One other thing to consider. You may find your ag reporter can't tell red spring wheat from Laird lentils. Sometimes non-farm people end up covering the farm scene, for reasons known only to the management of the radio station. In that case, please don't laugh at our exceedingly dumb questions, but be prepared to do a little extra explaining. I find that I still don't understand some things which might be totally elementary to you. And if you don't feel the reporter understands your work or its significance, after hearing what he said, phone him back and help him out. It's the only way he's going to learn. That's part of the teamwork.

A minor digression before we end. Until now, you've heard radio, radio, radio. To be fair, I want to venture a bit further afield, before I finish. Some radio people may not want to admit this, but there is something called television, and something else called newspaper. What about them?

To varying degrees, what has been said about radio applies also to other media. They are, or should be, as interested in your work as the people in radio, though each has a slightly different way of processing information.

There is a certain logic to this whole process. The person you're trying to reach gets the bare bones of the story on radio, and a little bit of detail. That might not sound like much, but you've at least triggered his interest. Television adds some more detail. More detail is added by the daily newspaper, and even more by those newspapers published by the major grain

marketing companies. The individual producer follows the story until he [redacted] gets as much detail as he wants. After learning what is available in the public media, the producer may then turn to the extension people for additional information -- which has further implications in terms of researchers keeping extension people (whether government, university, or industry) informed about ongoing research and results. The producer may even phone you with a question about his operation which is related to what you've said. That's probably the highest complement you'll get.

CONCLUSION

Teamwork between radio and research or extension personnel can work wonders in getting important agricultural information to farmers. When it comes to news and public service, it is free. While radio might not be able to get all the details of your activity, results or concern out to producers, it is a good "first line of attack" which producers can follow up at their leisure. And you don't have to wait for the radio person to call -- you can call him.

Our common interest is helping farmers with production and marketing. You, as a researcher or extension person, have important information to share with the people your research is designed to help. You and radio (and other media) can do that together, and do it effectively. So please remember "teamwork," with your radio partner.